

Free Access to GOD by a MEDIATOR.

A
S E R M O N,

PREACHED - 3/

AT BESSELS GREEN,

NEAR

SEVENOAKS, IN KENT.

BY JOHN STANGER.

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TO THE
CHURCH and CONGREGATION,

ASSEMBLING AT

The New Meeting House,

Bessels Green, &c,

Dear BRETHREN and FRIENDS,

YOU have already heard the substance of the following discourse from the pulpit, and at your request it is made public. My principal motive in doing this, is to promote your spiritual interests. I therefore present it to you in particular; and earnestly entreat you to make the subject familiar to your minds, by frequently reading it in your retirements and families. And the Lord grant it may be instructive, refreshing, and establishing to your souls; and to the souls of all, into whose hands it may come.

Sin hath set you all at an awful distance
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from God; and without being restored, and brought near to him, you cannot be happy; and unless you enjoy a present nearness to him, by faith in the great Mediator, you cannot hope for the future fruition of him in heaven. In the following discourse, I have attempted to state this important subject with plainness. You are witnesses, and God also, that the sacred doctrines and truths herein held forth, are what I have uniformly preached, and inculcated among you; being convinced, that divine consolation, true holiness, and genuine religion in all the fruits of it, are inseparably connected with the knowledge and faith of these gracious discoveries.

As I have solemnly devoted myself to the service of your souls, so a regard to sacred truth, and your welfare, in concurrence with the disposals of Divine Providence, hath led me to consider it my duty to continue among you, although it hath been attended with difficulties. I have however to make my grateful acknowledgments to you, for that concern you have shewn to me, in endeavoring to strengthen my hands, and encourage me in the work of God.

May

May that work prosper in each of your souls ; and the Lord grant that our fellowship together may be blessed to our mutual edification and comfort : that deriving constant supplies from the fountain of all grace, we may experience the joys of faith, have our fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.

I am,

Dear BRETHREN, and FRIENDS,

Your faithful and willing servant,

in the Gospel of CHRIST,

JOHN STANGER.

*Bessels Green,
June 24, 1785.*

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EPHESIANS III. 12.

*In whom we have boldness and access
with confidence by the faith of him.*

THE Gospel of Jesus Christ is of unspeakable worth. Herein the riches of divine grace are exhibited, and a free, complete, and everlasting salvation made known to a guilty world. Here we behold the ever blessed God, displaying the lustre of his perfections, by raising to himself a people out of the apostate race to the praise of his glory: rescuing them from sin and ruin; bringing them to himself, and making them happy. We learn here how the rights of divine government are maintained, and the threatenings against sin executed; while grace is freely extended to the guilty, their sins pardoned, and their persons justified before their offended sovereign. In this sacred revelation, the adorable Jehovah emphatically proclaims himself under that awful yet endearing character, which excites the astonishment of angels, and the praise of the redeemed, *The JUST GOD and the SAVIOUR*, Isa. xlv. 21. In the gospel of Jesus we are likewise informed how miserable creatures, who are defiled and polluted by sin, are delivered from its malignant influence, restored to vital holiness, and formed for communion with a ho-

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ly God. For the accomplishment of these important ends, ample provision is made by divine grace; and thereby a new and living way opened for those, who were alienated from, and enemies to God, to have access to him, and be for ever happy. *That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.* Rom. v. 21.

This rich and sovereign grace of God, which is the great subject of the gospel, originates in his own free love and eternal purpose. From this sacred source issue all the blessings of salvation and eternal life. The whole of this amazing provision, prior to its open manifestation, was a mystery hid in God; the mystery of his will; the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the world unto our glory: ver. 9, of this chap. Eph. i. 9. 1 Cor. ii. 7. This grace was made known to man, immediately after he had first sinned; and the divine light, like the dawning of the morning, increased through the old testament dispensation, though more particularly confined to the people of Israel, for it was long hid from the gentile nations; and its clearest and fullest manifestation was not made to the world, till after our Lord's exaltation in heaven, when he fulfilled his gracious promise to his apostles, and sent the Holy Ghost to lead them into all truth. John xvi. 13. Then the gospel received the highest confirmation, and the Sun of righteousness shone forth in his meridian glory. Blessed be God, who hath extended the enlivening rays of this divine light to us: and that our eyes have seen, and our ears have heard, these wonderful things; which, in respect to their sacred origin and immutable stability, are according to the eternal purpose, which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord. Ver. 11.

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The Apostle having observed in the preceding verses of the chapter, that this divine mystery and gracious purpose of God was now made known in the gospel, and that he himself, though mean and unworthy, was the honoured instrument of publishing these glad tidings to the gentile world; he in the words of the text mentions a very capital and distinguishing privilege, which all those persons enjoy, *to whom God makes known the riches of the glory of this mystery.* They having their minds enlightened into it, and receiving it as the truth of God, have free access into all this fulness. Having a view of Christ as herein exhibited, and being by faith vitally united to him, they behold a way opened in which they can draw near to God, with confidence, joy, and hope; They can look to God as their father; and in this relation to him, see their interest in all the blessings of the everlasting covenant.

In discoursing on the words before us, I propose,

I. To take notice of some obvious truths implied in the subject, which tend to evince its importance.

II. Inquire into the way, which God hath graciously provided, for a sinners access to himself.

III. Point out some of the peculiar advantages and blessings which those enjoy, who are interested in this great privilege.

IV. Conclude with a few reflections on the subject.

I. I AM to take notice of some obvious truths implied in the subject, which may tend to evince its importance.

God made man upright; and so long as he continued in this state of original purity, he doubtless enjoyed near and happy communion with his adorable maker and sovereign. By sin, this happiness was forfeited and lost, and man became miserably alienated from his God. His expulsion from the earthly paradise, was an awful token of his being cut off from communion with the source of felicity. Gen. iii. 23, 24. Sin having thus entered into the world, it hath diffused its dreadful contagion through the whole human race. The soul of every individual is infected with the awful malady, so that *the imagination of every man's heart is evil from his youth*, Gen. viii, 21. The first parents of mankind being depraved and polluted by sin, the pollution and depravation spreads through all their offspring, for *that which is born of the flesh is flesh*; which evidently implies, that there is in every one by nature a principle and disposition, opposite to that which is holy and spiritual: compare John iii. 3—6. The fountain being corrupt, the streams must necessarily be impure. This mournful fact is asserted by the apostle, *we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath even as others*. Eph. ii. 3. He who observes the apparent natural propensities of mankind around him, and at the same time looks into his own heart, and compares what he sees in others, and what he feels in himself, with the infallible oracles, may from hence derive irrefragable evidence of the natural corruption of the hu-

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man mind, and that this corruption is universal. This being the case, the state and condition of mankind is wretched and miserable indeed: which will be further manifest by considering,

1. That mankind in their fallen state are naturally prone to depart from God, and are awfully alienated from him. To love, serve, and glorify God, is the bounden duty of all men as being his creatures, supported by his power, and constant partakers of his bounty; and as God is the source of felicity, so nothing can be of equal importance to the enjoyment of his favour. But such is the folly and misery of the apostate race, that instead of seeking God, their pursuits are directed to other objects and things. Instead of love to God, subjection to his government, and a concern for his glory, the world has their hearts, it engrosses their warmest affections, and their chief inquiry is, *who will shew us any temporal good: they mind the things of the flesh*, and things that are earthly, as the sole objects of their earnest pursuit. Psal. iv. 6. Rom. viii. 5. Phil. iii. 19. Hence they are ignorant what it is to converse with God; they have no access to him, nor any fervent desires after him. Regardless of the divine authority, and insensible of their own truest interest, they live *without God in the world*, Eph. ii. 12. and the language of their hearts is, *what is the Almighty that we should serve him, and what profit shall we have if we pray unto him*. Job xxi. 15.

To live in a state of alienation from God is very dreadful indeed, yet there are multitudes who rest themselves satisfied in this state, and seem to be no ways alarmed with their awful situation. But let me entreat thee, O thou thoughtless creature, whoever thou

art, to consider that *destruction and misery are in thy ways*. Rom. iii. 16. Thou art engaged and amused with the enjoyments of the world, and the gratifications of sense; and all your care is engrossed by these, while God is forgotten, and his word is neglected; while the favor of God, and your own eternal interest are trifled with. May the Lord in mercy rouse thee from thy dangerous slumber, and convince thee that *the end of these things is death*: Rom. vi. 21, and may he direct thy feet into the paths of peace.

2. As mankind are naturally prone to turn off from God, so they are defiled and polluted by sin, and thereby incapable of any intercourse or fellowship with him, considered as a God of holiness: *what communion hath with light darkness?* The soul of man by nature being morally impure, and under the dominion and influence of sin, there is in him a dreadful contrariety to real holiness, and an utter aversion to it; and consequently a total disinclination to draw near to God, or seek after him, for *the carnal mind is enmity against God*. Rom. viii. 7. While this enmity remains, the sinner is afar off from God, for only *the pure in heart* can approach to, and enjoy him. So long therefore as the heart continues under the tyranny of sin, and its abominable pollution, there can be no fellowship with him, who is the fountain of unspotted purity and un sullied holiness. A person abiding in this wretched condition, has no capacity, disposition, or meetness to enjoy God, either in this, or the future world, being destitute of that *holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord*. Heb. xii. 14.

3. Mankind in their fallen state are also under the guilt of sin, exposed to the just sentence of that
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divine law they have violated, and to the wrath of a sin-avenging God. Hence they stand cut off from all access to God, or hope of acceptance with him, on the foot of their own righteousness. Sin is a contrariety to the revealed will, as well as to the holy nature of God. The divine law not only manifests what sin is, but also what it deserves. *It reveals the wrath of God against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men*, Rom. i. 18. against every sin, even the least departure from absolute perfection. It denounces an awful sentence against every transgressor, for it is written, *cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them*. Gal. iii. 10. Thus the guilty soul stands doomed to banishment and misery from God. The flaming sword of divine justice forbids his approach to the source of felicity, and he lies under the tremendous threatening of being *punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power*. 2. Thes. i. 9.

4. Such is the misery of the apostate race, that they cannot have access to God, or find acceptance with him, by virtue of any natural principles they possess, or any obedience they are capable of performing. There is, indeed, a strong propensity in mankind, to cleave to the covenant of works. They are naturally led to think of some power or capacity within themselves, to do that which shall recommend them to the divine favor. And, though they may acknowledge themselves to be sinners, and that their obedience is defective, yet, having some general notion of Christ as a saviour, they hope that through him their imperfections will be overlooked; and by doing the best they can, God will be merciful

to them. Still all their hopes of acceptance with God hinge on some goodness of their own: their honest principle; their sincere desires; their freedom from some immoralities and sins; and the performance of some civil, moral, or religious duties; these, and things of the like nature, form the ground of their confidence, and for which they conclude they stand entitled to the mercy of God through Jesus Christ.

If we enquire into the grounds of this natural propensity, it will appear that man was originally formed to live under a covenant of works. His nature was fitted to this constitution. So long as he continued obedient, so long he enjoyed the favor of God. And although he is now a fallen creature, and stands guilty before his omniscient judge, yet he still retains the original idea, that the divine favor can no otherwise be enjoyed but by his obedience. Meer reason and conscience can carry him no further. And this principle, through the darkness of his understanding, is cherished and cultivated as being highly flattering to the pride of his heart, that odious production of human depravity. On this foundation, mankind in a state of nature, labour to build one another up, and mean to erect a tower, whose top shall reach to heaven. On this fabric of a vision they rest their souls, and from hence loudly proclaim the dignity of human nature, and the excellence of moral virtue; while the gospel of Jesus is treated with contempt, and those distinguishing and precious doctrines, which relate to the way of a sinner's acceptance with God, are reviled as irrational, and considered as the weak peculiarities of enthusiastic bigots. *Being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, they have*

have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God. Rom. x. 3.

To prevent any misunderstanding, I would further observe, that the obligation on mankind, to yield obedience to the divine law, is undeniably evident. This obedience is a reasonable service. It is a debt of gratitude we owe to the supreme sovereign, on account of the numerous benefits and favors, he bestows upon us. Our obligation hereto, ariseth from the relation we stand in to God, and to our fellow creatures; consequently, while this relation remains indissoluble, the obligation must continue perpetual and immutable. It may likewise be observed, that the moral law requires unfinning obedience; a conformity of heart and life, to every point and tittle of its sacred injunctions. It being holy and just, every departure from its requirements must be sinful. If it therefore admitted of any thing less than complete obedience, it would so far give a licence to sin, and be contradictory to itself; requiring one thing, yet admitting another opposite to that required. But this can never consist with the immutable holiness of the divine legislator, *who is of purer eyes than to behold evil.* Hab. i. 13.

Though the divine law requires perfect and perpetual obedience of mankind, yet, in this obedience, every one has failed; for *all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.* This awful fact is clearly and fully asserted in the scriptures: Rom. iii. 9—19, 23. 2. Chro. vi. 36. Eccl. vii. 20. Gal. iii. 22. 1 John i. 8, 10. And having sinned, we are all far from righteousness. All our best doings are imperfect, polluted, and worthless; and cannot properly be called righteousness, for they can avail us nothing for our acceptance with God, nor afford us any, the
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least ground of confidence, in approaching him. *We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags.* Isa. lxiv. 6. This being the state of all, it follows, that it is both vain and dangerous for any to trust in their own obedience, or doings, to recommend them to the divine favor. *By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight. And as many as are of the works of the law, are under the curse.* Rom. iii. 20. Gal. iii. 10. Here, all mankind stand on a level. Whatever difference there may be between some persons and others in a moral view, or whatever difference in the degree of guilt, between one and another; yet, as all have sinned, so all who remain in their fallen state are under condemnation.

Their hopes are all cut off by the covenant of works; and there is no refuge for the guilty soul, by any natural powers, or capacities he possesses; or in any obedience he can perform.

Such is the misery of man, as a fallen creature. And from hence appears the worth and importance of that gracious provision, made in Christ for sinners. The subject which I have been holding forth to view, is indeed awful and alarming; but the scene will be delightfully reversed, in our entering on what I next proposed: that is,

II. To inquire into the way, which God hath graciously provided, for a sinner's access to himself.

In that ruinous and hopeless condition, into which sin hath involved us, the supreme sovereign might justly have left us all, to perish for ever. We had no claim to the divine mercy; and had mercy been for ever withheld, still God would have been just and righteous. But, wonder, O heavens! and be astonished, O earth! Instead of affronted justice executing its

righteous denunciations on guilty criminals, grace erects her throne. A proclamation of divine mercy is made in the glorious gospel: its joyful import is, *The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious.* Exo. xxxiv. 6.

This reviving discovery of divine mercy, is altogether sovereign and free. Here, grace abounds in its inexhaustible riches, in order to make the guilty and miserable happy: to which end, a new and living way is opened for their access to God, which is the subject of our present inquiry: and concerning which, I would observe, that this way is graciously opened by the mediation of Jesus Christ; it is the way of faith; and the way of holiness.

1. The way, the only way, of a sinners access to God, is by the Lord Jesus Christ, the great mediator.

The holy law of God being immutable, there is no way for sinners to approach with acceptance to the eternal sovereign, but by a full and complete satisfaction being given to all its demands, and all its denunciations. In this view, the apostate race of men lie without help, and without hope, as to all they can do by their best obedience, and most laboured efforts. But, for ever adored be the sovereign grace of God, *help is laid on one that is mighty.* The Lord Jesus is the appointed saviour: he stands responsible for all that the divine law requires, and he alone is equal to this great undertaking. Having engaged himself, as the surety of the covenant, in behalf of all those, *who were given him of the Father*, he voluntarily undertook their cause, and, in his great love, came to redeem and save them. For this arduous work, he was every way qualified: for,

As the persons to be redeemed and saved, were partakers of flesh and blood, it was needful that he also should take part of the same. As sin was committed, and the law violated, by the human race, it seems absolutely requisite, that the penalty threatened by the law, should be suffered; and the obedience required, be performed, by one in human nature, in order to make a full atonement for sin, and to bring in a justifying righteousness. For this end *the word was made flesh and dwell among us.* John i. 14.

It appears also highly necessary, that the surety for sinners should himself be without sin. Such was our great High Priest, who offered up himself as the sacrifice. He was, *that holy thing*, born of the virgin, free from all natural depravation; and was *holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners; as a lamb without blemish and without spot.* Luke i, 35. Heb. vii, 26, 1 Pet. i, 19.

But as the great and arduous work of saving sinners, is beyond the power of a mere creature to effect, we find that our compassionate mediator is the Son of God; One with the Father; the creator, upholder, and sovereign of all worlds. True and proper divinity being united to the human nature of Jesus, all that he did and suffered hath infinite merit and worth in it. The sufferings he endured, and the obedience he rendered, constitutes a full atonement, and an everlasting righteousness. *For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.* Col. ii. 9.

Our glorious Emanuel being in every respect capacitated for this great work, and able to save to the uttermost, he became a substitute in the room of the guilty, to redeem them from the curse, and possess them with a title to life. The obedience which the law required,

required, he performed in its fullest extent: and the punishment which the law threatened to the offender, to this he submitted, and this he endured in all its dreadful severity. Although he was the Holy One of God, yet being the sinners surety, sin was charged and imputed to him. This is very frequently mentioned by the inspired writers, and held forth in the plainest language, as a doctrine of the utmost importance. Accordingly we read, *The Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all. He died for the ungodly. He bore our sins. He suffered for the unjust. He was once offered to bear the sins of many. He was made sin for us. He was a curse for us.* Isa. liii. 6. Rom. v. 6. 1 Pet. i. 24. iii. 18. Heb. ix. 28. 2 Cor. v. 21. Gal. iii. 13. What astonishing condescension, and compassion is here exhibited! Look to Calvary, and behold the awful scene. There you see the Son of God extended in agonies and blood, under the enormous weight of aggravated guilt. The sword of inexorable justice is sheathed in his heart, yet love stronger than death, bears him on to the final completion of his arduous work, when, to the everlasting joy of his people, he said, *it is finished,* John xix. 30.

In this finished work of the blessed Jesus, full satisfaction is made to all the requirements of the divine law, and the demands of justice. The price of redemption is paid down to the very last mite; an all-sufficient atonement is made for sin; and a perfect and everlasting righteousness is wrought to justify the ungodly. This being done, he hath, as our glorious High Priest and prevalent intercessor, entered into the most holy place, even into heaven itself, with his own blood: there he appears in all the virtue of his great sacrifice and perfect obedience. Here-

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by a way is opened for miserable sinners, and guilty aliens, to draw near to God with acceptance. *Having therefore brethren boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus.* Heb. x. 19.

Such is the infinite importance of the obedience and sufferings of our adorable mediator, in the evangelical system, that herein all his offices and works centre. What he completed on the cross, constitutes the very essence and glory of the gospel. To this all the discoveries of divine grace to sinful man have a direct, and an immediate reference. This might be most amply demonstrated, by considering, that in the cross of Jesus, the love of God to man has its fullest and brightest manifestation. Rom. v. 8. 1 John iv. 10. John xv. 13. Rev. i. 5. The prophets of the old testament, who all gave witness to the promised Messiah, testified beforehand the sufferings he should endure. 1 Pet. i. 11. The ceremonial law, in its numerous sacrifices, was a shadow of the gospel; and evidently typified the offering of the body of Jesus once for all. Heb. x. 10. This was the leading and capital subject of the ministration of the apostles, when, with a divine commission, they preached the gospel to the world; we, say they, *preach Christ crucified.* 1 Cor. i. 23. All the blessings of divine grace are bestowed in reference to the blood of the new covenant. Mat. xxvi. 28. Spiritual life in the soul, vital godliness, and all its genuine fruits, are derived from the cross of Christ; which, to them who are saved, is the power of God. 1 Cor. i. 18. And when we reflect on that sacred institution of Jesus, whereby his followers are to shew forth his death till he come, it must necessarily lead us to this conclusion, that the doctrines of the cross are essential to the gospel, and of the utmost importance to be constantly kept in

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view. 1. Cor. xi. 26. *God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.* Gal. vi.

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The gospel throughout points to Jesus as the alpha and omega, the only and alfsufficient saviour, and sure foundation of confidence for sinners; and while he stands revealed to us in so exalted and important a character, the divinity of that character is attested in the most ample and glorious manner. He comes into the world furnished with divine credentials. The works he wrought bore witness to him; a voice from heaven declares him to be the beloved Son of God; and his resurrection from the dead was an irrefragable evidence, that what he engaged in was the will of his father, and completely available for the great ends, for which he did it. *Him hath God the Father sealed.* John vi. 27.

To whom then shall sinners look? to whom shall we go, but to this adorable mediator? He alone is able and mighty to save. All fulness dwells in him. His work is in every view complete. On this im-

* If the several topics suggested in this paragraph, and their connection with the death of Christ, be duly considered, it must necessarily be concluded, that the doctrine of Christ's proper atonement for sin is essential to the gospel; and consequently, that true faith includes a regard to this great doctrine.

I would therefore entreat those persons to consider what they are doing, who represent the doctrines of the gospel as meer speculations; and consider it of little or no consequence, what a person believes. And, I would ask, on what scriptural ground, the conduct of some other persons can be vindicated, who, while they lay peculiar stress on the doctrine of the atonement, do nevertheless unite in christian fellowship, or form connections equivalent thereto, with those who oppose this doctrine, or who seem to have no idea of its importance?

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inmutable rock, the distressed sinner may rest his soul in peace. Hereby he may draw near to God with freedom and confidence: there is no other way of access. He himself declares, *I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me.* John xiv. 6.

2. As the Lord Jesus Christ is the only way to the Father, it is through believing, or by the faith of him; that any are brought into this way. The mediation of the Lord Jesus, as that through which alone a sinner can have access to God, is a doctrine of the highest importance. This doctrine you may profess, and openly avow, and yet be only a worshipper in the outer court, and never enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus; have no access to God, or fellowship with him. A person may have a form of sound doctrine in his head, and make a profession of this before others, and be a stranger to the privilege mentioned in the text. As therefore this access to God, is declared by the apostle to be *by the faith of Jesus Christ*, it is highly necessary we should enquire into the nature of this faith, and how a person becomes possessed of it. And this enquiry must appear of the utmost importance to every one who duly considers, that the enjoyment of all the blessings of salvation and eternal life, are spoken of throughout the New Testament, as being inseparably connected with faith in Jesus Christ.

Faith in Jesus, necessarily supposes some apprehension and knowledge of him, as he is revealed in the gospel; for *how shall they believe on him, of whom they have not heard.* The gospel is appointed to be published to the world, and Christ exhibited as the great and only saviour, that those who are in dark-

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ness and ignorance may be brought to know him, and believe in him. *Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.* Rom. x. 14, 17.

In this sacred word is a discovery of all that sinners need, to save, and to make them happy. The rich provision is completely suitable to the wants of the guilty and perishing. Whatever are your necessities, O ye wretched and miserable, here is an allsufficient fulness held forth to view. Jesus is able and mighty to save to the very uttermost. Are you sensible of the evil of sin, and do you feel the burden of it? Is it terrifying to your consciences, and are you longing for deliverance? Then you are the persons, to whom this divine message of mercy is immediately addressed. To you is the word of this salvation sent. The compassionate Saviour singles you out, as the objects of his peculiar regard, and invites you to look to him for all you need. *Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink:* Mat xi. 28. John vii. 37.

And, for your encouragement, be assured, that these blessings which you stand in need of, are absolutely free. They are free gifts of divine grace, bestowed without money and without price. Isa. lv. 1. They are designed only for the unworthy, the impoverished, and the miserable. The best of mankind have nothing in them, to recommend them to this grace, for all have sinned. They have no better claim to it, than publicans, and harlots, and blasphemers, and the very chief of sinners. The scripture hath concluded all under sin: and every sensible sinner, be his sins ever so heinous and aggravated, is encouraged to look to Jesus, in whom there is a free and full salvation for all, be whomsoever they may, *who*
D *come*

come unto God by him. Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out. John vi. 37.

The person who believes in Jesus, comes to him, humbly sits at his feet, and hears his word. To this word he gives a serious, and earnest attention. The light and glory of it illuminates his understanding, and shines into his heart. Hence it is apprehended in its suitableness and worth, in its beauty and loveliness, and in its reality and certainty. This evinces to the mind that it is divine; that it is in very deed, the truth of God. As such it is received into the heart and soul, as being worthy of all acceptance; and there it abides as an ingrafted word, in its divine life, power, and influence. The Lord Jesus Christ is formed in the heart, as the only foundation of confidence and hope. The soul is vitally united to him, and there is a real participation and enjoyment of his divine righteousness, and everlasting salvation. Hence is experienced peace in the conscience, and divine consolation; and the incorruptible seed of the word being received, it lives and abides in the soul, and brings forth fruit unto everlasting life. John i. 12. iii. 33. 1 Thes. ii. 13. Jam. i. 21. Gal. iv. 19. Rom. xv. 12. Rom. v. 1. 2. 1 Pet. i. 23.

This is faith in Jesus Christ; and this faith is the gift of God. It is his sovereign prerogative to impart it, and to make his word effectual for that important end: for neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase. He it is who opens the heart to the word, and engages the attention to it: and then brings the word home to the heart, and writes it there in indelible characters by his eternal spirit. Hence it is, that all who believe in Jesus, believe
through

through grace.* 1 Cor. iii. 7. Acts xvi. 14. 2 Cor. iii. 3. Acts xviii. 27.

Those, who have obtained this precious faith, know the way of access to God, and they are brought into it, for they know Christ, and are made one with him. By his dying agonies the veil is rent, and an open door set before them, by which they can enter, and approach the most holy. His great work, completed on the cross, his present appearance in heaven, and the free promise of grace made in him, being received as truth, and realized to the heart, forms the sole ground of their confidence. And from hence, with sacred boldness, they can approach the throne of the supreme Majesty, and with freedom address him, as their God, and their Father. *Now in Christ Jesus, ye who sometime were far off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ.* Eph. ii. 13.

3. The way of access to God, is the way of holiness.

Man by nature is unholy, and defiled by sin; it is therefore absolutely necessary, that a real change from sin to holiness take place in the soul, in order to a person's having access to the fountain of un sullied purity. *The pure in heart only can see God,* so as to enjoy him. Agreeable hereto we find holiness of heart and life, always spoken of in the scripture, as essential to the character of the people of God. That grace which brings salvation to the

* Faith being the gift of God, it follows, that regeneration, or the production of true religion in the soul, is his work. This is a doctrine, which I conceive to be clearly taught in the bible; which being admitted, the other great doctrines of the gospel, respecting salvation by free, sovereign, and discriminating grace, cannot consistently be rejected.

soul, always produces true holiness there. This is begun in regeneration, when a person is born of God, and divine spiritual life is communicated to the soul by the Holy Ghost. As a person grows in grace, he advances and increases in holiness; and becomes more and more sanctified, in proportion to which its fruits will be manifest, in a practical conformity to the will of God, and in a selfdenying and unreserved obedience to the divine precepts. This holiness now possessing the soul, and influencing the conversation, shall be perfected in the future glorious state. The happy soul when released from the body, shall enjoy an entire freedom from sin, and be *with Christ*. And at the resurrection of the just, the body shall awake in the likeness of its glorious head, spiritualized and made holy in all its powers. *It is sown a natural body, but it is raised a spiritual body.* Phil. i. 23. 1 Cor. xv. 44. Every one who is born of God, now breathes after him, and is formed for communion with him. As holiness increases, this communion becomes more intimate; and when holiness is perfected in heaven, there will be the nearest approach to, and most happy enjoyment of God. *We know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.* 1 John iii. 2.

This holiness is not an human attainment, but a divine production in the soul. It is not a condition of our being saved, and brought near to God; but an important branch of that salvation, which is all of grace, and a fruit of vital union with Christ. That change of heart, which is productive of true holiness, is effected by an almighty power. It is the work of the Holy Spirit of God, who is called *the Spirit of holiness*. By him we are regenerated and sanctified, and whatever we experience or enjoy of spiritual blessings

sings in our souls, is the fruit of his sacred agency. Phil. ii. 13. 2 Thes. ii. 13. 1 Pet. i. 2. Gal. v. 22, 23.

The work of God in the soul of man, in the production of divine life and holiness, is not an enthusiastic or visionary notion; but explicable and intelligible in its nature and process. The influence and operation of the Spirit of God on the heart, is by the gospel; agreeable to which, we find, those sacred works, which are ascribed to his sacred agency, are said to be effected by that divine word. Compare, John iii. 5. Tit. iii. 5. Jam, i. 18. 1 Pet. i. 22, 23. John xvii. 17. Hence it is, that the gospel is declared to be *the power of God unto salvation*, and to *work effectually in them that believe*, as being *the ministration of the spirit*. While, therefore, the production and increase of religion in the soul is the work of God, this work is effected in a way agreeable to those reasoning powers and faculties he hath given us. The doctrines revealed, the motives suggested, and the objects presented to view in the gospel, are what have their influence in the heart, to lead to that vital godliness, that genuine experience, and that practical conformity to the divine will, which distinguishes the real christian. Col. i. 6.

Agreeable hereto, when the gospel is received *in power and in the Holy Ghost*, and enjoyed as the word of divine truth, while it possesses the soul with a sacred freedom and confidence in approaching to God, it is also experienced in its vital power and influence; transforming the heart, and creating it anew in true holiness. No sooner is the gospel believed, than it operates to the cure of the soul, by checking the malignant influence of sin, dispelling its horrid contagion, and diffusing life, purity, and health, through
all

all the powers of the inner man. Those who are made one with Christ by vital union, are quickened with him by the power of his life-giving word; and and by the faith of this they are purified and sanctified, and made an holy people; and therefore disposed and formed for sacred intercourse and fellowship with an holy God. Eph. ii. 5. John v. 25. Acts xv. 9. John xvii. 17. Acts xxvi. 18.

As the gospel is thus effectual to produce holy principles and dispositions in the soul, so while it opens to the believer a way of access *into the holiest, by the blood of Jesus*, he finds this way to be the *way of holiness*; for his heart is now engaged to God, to love him, to desire him, and delight in him. Holiness is the element in which he lives; and all those things which are of a holy nature and tendency, become his entertainment and pleasure. And as the believer increases in the knowledge of Christ, and becomes more established, grounded, and settled in the faith of him, the more his heart becomes purified, and he has his fruit unto holiness. Familiarizing the gospel to his heart, surveying its divine excellencies, and contemplating it as a system of holiness, as well as of grace, the closer he cleaves to it, and the more he lives upon it, the more he experiences of its transforming efficacy: for *beholding with open face as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, he is changed into the same image from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord.* 2 Cor. iii. 18.

This is the way which the gospel reveals, for sinners of the fallen race to come to God. In Jesus they have an open door, and an high way of access set before them. In his righteousness and fulness, there is every thing they need to recommend them. This being apprehended and enjoyed by faith, they

are brought into this way, and can now draw near unto God. And as the word of truth, written on the heart by the divine Spirit, is a sanctifying word; so those principles and dispositions are hereby wrought in them, by which *they delight in approaching to God*. But I go on,

III. To point out some of the peculiar advantages and blessings, which those enjoy, who are interested in this great privilege; *We have boldness and access with confidence*.

Here is a happy freedom and liberty in approaching to God. This is enjoyed by all those who receive the gospel, in the knowledge and faith of it. The Lord Jesus is the sacred door, by which they enter; and having entered, they *go in and out, and find pasture*. In considering this invaluable privilege, we may properly include what follows.

1. Such persons have access to God, as pardoning their sins. When a person is made sensible of his true state as a sinner, and alarmed with the apprehensions of divine wrath, he then sees the vast importance of forgiveness with God. But how shall he obtain the inestimable blessing? The light of nature, the powers of reason, and all human expedients fail, and are unavailable, to give him an assurance of the blessing; and to bring peace into the awakened conscience. But the gospel of Jesus (for ever adored be the grace it reveals; and for ever precious the relief it brings) the gospel of Jesus reveals to us with the fullest evidence, that *there is forgiveness* with God: and it points out the way, with the utmost clearness and certainty, in which this forgiveness is extended and enjoyed. The Lord Jesus is
herein

herein exhibited, as being a substitute in the room of the guilty, bearing their sins and making a full atonement. *Through him is preached the forgiveness of sins.* Acts xiii. 38. Forgiveness of the very chief of sinners: their most aggravated crimes, and multiplied transgressions. Forgiveness, absolutely free, bestowed on the most unworthy and undeserving; without any preparative, or entitling condition; granted entirely without money, and without price. This is good tidings of great joy to the distressed soul: he hears it, and receives it as the truth of God. It brings relief to his conscience, and joy unspeakable. In this he trusts. In the Redeemer's finished work, he finds a sure ground of confidence and rest for his soul. Now he can approach the throne of a sin-avenging God, without being terrified. He beholds the flaming sword, which stood to guard the way of the tree of life, quenched in the blood of Emanuel: and sees the gates of paradise thrown open, inviting him to draw near to his forgiving God.

The humble believer, though sensible of the evil of sin, and of his own unworthiness, beholds the pardon of his sins secured, by the great atonement of his dying Lord. On this he lives from day to day. This is the support of his soul, the source of his joy, and the ground of his hope. Hence he can defy every enemy, and every accuser; and with the triumphant apostle say, "*Who is he that condemneth? it is Christ that died—he is risen—he is at the right hand of God.*" There he presents the blood of his great sacrifice. "He hath *an everlasting priesthood,*" and hence I look "for everlasting forgiveness. His promise is the "ground of my confidence." *He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is pass-*

ed from death unto life. John v. 24.

O ye that believe in, and receive Christ, this is your distinguishing privilege. *He hath loved you, and given himself for you*; and by faith in him, you receive the remission of sins. Now you may draw near to the throne, and have access with confidence, for peace is made by the blood of the cross. What marvellous grace is this! You no longer hear the thunders of the law, but the gentle and peaceful language of forgiving love. *Ye are not come to the mount—that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest; but ye are come unto Mount Sion—and unto Jesus the mediator—and to the blood of sprinkling.* Heb. xii. 18—24.

If, brethren, you have a real enjoyment of this great privilege, your hearts will be warmed with gratitude, and your lips will abound with praise, to your God and Saviour. Far from sinning because grace abounds, you will experience, that by cleaving to the cross, and realizing its doctrines, sin will become more and more hateful to you. Your love to Jesus, and all its genuine fruits, will increase and abound, in proportion to your views of the largeness of the debt forgiven, and of the freeness of that grace, by which you obtain forgiveness. Luke vii. 40—50.

2. Those who have access to God, are brought near to him, as their covenant God, and Father. In the blood and righteousness of their glorious safety, they stand complete; *and by him they are predestinated unto the adoption of children, according to the good pleasure of his will.* Eph. i. v. So that now they can draw near to God, and converse with him, under the soul-reviving character of a father. Here, O believer, you may with sacred admiration, contemplate the won-

ders of divine grace. *The high and lofty one, who inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy*, hath graciously condescended to regard thee, when thou wast an alien and an enemy. In love to thy soul, he hath delivered thee from the pit of corruption, and from the miseries of thy forlorn state; and advanced thee to the highest dignity, and to the nearest relation to himself. *Behold what manner of love the father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.*
 1 John iii. 1.

O ye children of the most high, having free access to him, and being received into his paternal embraces, you may now trust your all with him, and live upon him, as your almighty father. In his immutable love, tender compassion, and constant care; in his rich beneficence, and powerful guardianship, you may place the confidence of your souls. And while you are a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God; and he rejoices over you with joy, and rests in his love; you may go on your way rejoicing, being assured your relation to Jehovah is indissoluble, and that nothing in earth or hell *shall separate you from his love.* Rom. viii. 38, 39.

3. This privilege also includes, freedom in addressing God in prayer; and so the words of the text are understood by some, as referring more particularly to that freedom of speech, which the believer finds in speaking to his God. This, however, with other things, is doubtless intended. And surely, the privilege of addressing ourselves to God, and that, in the endearing character of a father, is great indeed. Jesus, the mediator, hath opened the way of approach, and marked it with his blood; and while he gives

us liberty of access, we hear him declare, *whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you.* John xvi. 23.

In the faith of this great mediator, the saints can draw near to their gracious God and father. To him they make known their wants, and before him they spread their sorrows. Under all their afflictions, burdens, and trials, and even when their hearts are ready to be overwhelmed within them, they fly to the eternal God as their refuge. They cry, and the Lord answers them, and strengthens them with strength in their souls. In the faith of his promises, they call upon him in the day of trouble, and they find him faithful, who hath promised. Amidst all their wants spiritual and temporal, they seek the Lord, having this confidence, that *whatever they ask according to his will he heareth them.* 1 John v. 14. Sometimes, indeed, they may not receive a direct and immediate answer to their petitions. They may ask what is not for their good; or they may ask for needful blessings to be granted in a larger measure, in a different way, or at a different time, than what the Lord sees fitting for them. In which cases, though he denies them in love, he will, notwithstanding, give them to experience, that they do not seek his face in vain, but that *it is good for them to call upon God.* Psalm lxxiii. 28.

Prayer is an exercise, peculiarly suited to the very turn and disposition of the renewed soul. To those who are born of God, this will not be a task or burden, but a delightful exercise; it will not be considered as a dull duty, but a heart-reviving privilege. Being formed by divine grace for real holiness, they will delight in seeking to, and conversing with a holy God, and holy Saviour. And it is their pecu-

liar happiness, at special seasons, in their waiting on the Lord, to have their hearts enlarged; and, by the assistance of the holy spirit, to pour out that effectual, fervent prayer, which availeth much. They draw near to the seat of God, and order their cause before him; and fill their mouths with arguments. Job xxiii, 3, 4.

And every one who enters into the true spirit and glory of this privilege, can address the Lord with liberty, and confidence of soul. "This is my God" and father, says the believer; amidst all my unworthiness, he views me in his son, *blameless and un-reproveable*; amidst all my numerous wants, he is able and ready to supply me. He knows my inmost soul, he hears my cries. *All my desire is before him, and my groaning is not hid from him. He puts my tears into his bottle, and writes them all in his book.* He cannot, he will not desert me. He hath given his word to encourage my applications to him; and this divine word, these precious promises, are the secure ground of my expectations; and therefore I trust in him, that *he will supply all my need; that he will withhold no good thing; but will perfect that which concerneth me.*" Thus the believer holds divine communion with his heavenly Father in Christ. In prayer and praise, he rises in his affections above the world, and has a glimpse of heaven. And in these happy seasons, he sometimes finds a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, that he may enjoy more special and uninterrupted nearness to him. The happiness he enjoys in communion with God, is so substantial and real, that it is with reluctance he thinks of returning again to the world, and to sensible things; for he knows, that *in his presence is fullness of joy.* Psalm xvi. 11.

4. Those who are favored with access to God, are introduced into all *the fulness of the blessing of the gospel*. Every gift of divine grace is a part of the saints glorious inheritance, considered as the children of God. Gifts and blessings flowing from the pure fountain of divine love, and secured by the immutability of that love. Blessings, held forth in the word of promise, and the fulfilment of the promise confirmed by the oath of him that cannot lie. An everlasting covenant, made with Christ, on behalf of all the chosen seed; and this covenant ratified by the blood of the great surety. A covenant, the great outlines of which are, "*I will be to you a God, and ye shall be to me a people. I will put my laws in their minds, and write them in their hearts. Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. With blessing I will bless thee. I will give grace and glory. I will never turn away from doing thee good. All is yours in life, death, and eternity.*"

By faith in Jesus we have access into this grace, and hereby enjoy the rich munificence of our heavenly father. The righteousness of Jesus forms our title to the sacred inheritance; and by faith we enter into possession and enjoyment. Thus the poorest saint, as to this world, is rich in faith, and rich towards God; and has a *good part, which shall never be taken away*. Luke x. 42. The more a believer grows up in Christ, the clearer are his views of the fulness and worth of his inheritance, the more clear and certain his title appears, and the more his desires are led forth after a fuller enjoyment of it: and in proportion hereto, he has access with confidence into this fulness, and an *entrance is administered unto him abundantly, into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ*. 2 Pet. i. 11.

With

With this access to God, the believer may stand and look around, and survey his inheritance. He may look northward and southward, eastward and westward, and behold the land flowing with *milk and honey*; and with divine complacency may say, "All this is mine: all this I enjoy of free grace" "This is given me by virtue of my union with my glorious head, Christ Jesus. I have all, and abound, "for the Lord himself is my portion."

Here, indeed, the believer enjoys but a little, in comparison of what is in reversion; yet what he now enjoys is an earnest of the whole, and a certain pledge of all the fulness and glory of the heavenly state. He has now the experience of a measure, which is, everlasting life begun; and in faith and hope, he has a realizing and appropriating view of that complete fulness, which is life everlasting, in all its glorious consummation. In the Lord Jesus he has by *faith access into this grace wherein he stands, and rejoices in hope of the glory of God.* Rom. v. 2.

5. Those who believe in Jesus, have a real and certain experience of that sacred boldness and confidence in approaching to God, which is spoken of in the text. The mediator's work being perfect, every obstacle and impediment, which stood in the way, is removed. And being brought out of darkness into divine light, and having Christ and his truth living and abiding in them, they have an open door, and an highway of access into the holiest set before them. And the sacred truth, by its sanctifying efficacy in their souls, fits and disposes them to draw near to God with delight and pleasure. Therefore living by faith on the son of God, and being influenced by holy principles, their hearts cleave to the Lord, and they are happy

happy in a sense of his love to them. *Their fellowship is with the Father and his son Jesus Christ; and this fellowship is real and abiding, for God dwelleth in them, and they in him.* 1 John i. 3. iv. 12, 13.

As the gospel of Jesus is *the incorruptible word, which endureth for ever*; so the glorious objects and blessings it reveals, are immutable and eternal in their nature. This word the believer is led into the knowledge of, and he experiences its quickening, comforting, and sanctifying influence. And the eternal spirit having written this sacred word on his heart, there it remains and abides. *It dwelleth in him, and shall be in him for ever*: and there is an enjoyment of that unfailing grace it reveals, for Christ liveth in him; and he receives out of his fulness, grace for grace. On which consideration, it must necessarily be concluded, that the way of access to God is clear and open before him; and that he knows what it is, with a sacred confidence, and an holy disposition, to draw near to God as his father in Christ.

It is however necessary to observe, that a practical cleaving to Christ, to his truth, and ways, is of the utmost importance, in order to the happy enjoyment of this freedom and confidence, in approaching to God. To this we are very frequently exhorted in the New Testament. If through temptations or worldly ensnarements, inattention or lukewarmness, or by any means whatever, we disregard the gospel, so far our souls will be unhinged, and our sacred confidence flag. But, in proportion as our hearts cleave to the Lord, and we live by faith in Jesus; are instant in prayer, and familiarize to ourselves the word of truth; are watchful to improve the privileges of christian fellowship, and habituate ourselves to preserve a tenderness

derness, of conscience, in regard to sin and duty; so far shall we be experimentally acquainted with holy boldness and confidence, in approaching the throne of our covenant God and father. For by thus cleaving to Christ, who is the only way of access, we come to know more of him, and receive more from him. We hereby learn more of the immutable nature of those things, which are the ground of our confidence; and become more fully partakers of that holiness, which makes communion with God truly desirable.

If our hearts thus ardently go forth after God, in the faith of the gospel, we shall know what it is to live from day to day, under a sense of his love, and of our interest in him. Our hearts will then be enlarged, in a happy experience of the influence of divine truth, by the Holy Ghost given to us, and we shall go on our way rejoicing. This is the gracious design of God, respecting his people. It is not his will that they should remain in darkness and perplexity, but *walk in the light as he is in the light, and have fellowship with him. He hath shewn unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his council, that they might have strong consolation.* Heb. vi. 17, 18.*

* Some persons may possibly object, and say, "We cannot draw near to God with freedom and delight, without some special manifestation of his love to us, by the Holy Spirit. Without this, our hearts will be languid, and nothing comfortable can be experienced, &c." I answer: That I firmly believe, that every spiritual blessing, which the saints enjoy, is a free gift of divine grace; their enjoyment of which, is, by the Holy Spirit given to, and dwelling in them: through whose sacred influence they experience, in some happy seasons, their hearts enlarged, quickened, and comforted, to a degree not common. Yet this happy enlargement is connected with the knowledge and faith of divine truth. This truth being immutable,

Such

Such is the happiness of those, who have access to God by the great Mediator. Such is the distinguishing privilege, with which they are favored, and the blessings, of which they are made partakers. *Happy are the people who are in such a case; yea happy are the people, whose God is the Lord.* But I hasten,

IV. To close the whole, with some reflections on the subject.

I From hence appears, the vast importance and worth of the gospel. Herein is made known, the way, which infinite wisdom hath devised, and sovereign grace hath provided, for guilty, miserable aliens, to be brought near to God with acceptance: and by the efficacy of this sacred word, the heart is renewed, and formed for communion with him. This sacred word reveals the riches of divine grace, the fulness of Christ, and the greatness of that salvation, which he hath wrought. God hath *magnified his word above all his name*; and it certainly becomes us

and abiding in the soul, it affords the believer at all times an immovable ground of confidence, on which to rest: and from hence with joy he draws water, as out of the wells of salvation. Isa. xii. 3.

I should think myself wanting in a regard to the doctrines of grace, had I represented them of less importance and efficacy than what I have here done. I have sincerely attempted to state the subject of this discourse, agreeable to the words which the Holy Ghost teacheth. Should it please the Lord to render it useful to some of those little ones belonging to himself, my end is answered in it. I do not however expect to escape the censure of those, who think they are serving the cause of Christ by misrepresenting and calumniating their brethren. But their conduct does not terrify me, being assured, that as the bird by wandering, and as the swallow by flying, so the curse causeless shall not come. Prov. xxvi. 2.

most highly to esteem and honor it. It is *the glorious ministration of the eternal Spirit*, and that by which his gracious operations are experienced in the heart; for it is the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth. Let me exhort and entreat you therefore, to cleave to this word of truth. Study it, and pray over it; and beg of God to give you more of the spirit of wisdom and revelation, in the knowledge of Christ. If the gospel be neglected, you forsake the fountain of living waters, and then all other expedients will prove but as broken cisterns to you: for it is by the knowledge and faith of this divine truth, and by this only, whereby sinners are raised to the enjoyment of God. This led the apostle to say, *I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.* Phil. iii. 8.

2. We learn from this subject, why it is, that so many of our fellow creatures are prejudiced against the truth and ways of God. The gospel, as revealing salvation by free and sovereign grace, through the mediation of Jesus, lies opposite to men's natural views and principles. And as the doctrines, institutions, and precepts of the gospel are holy in their nature and tendency, they are in this view, opposite to men's sinful propensities. *My thoughts are not as your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord.* Isa. lv. 8. Mankind, in the darkness of their fallen state, are attached to the covenant of works; and are looking to some power, or some obedience of their own, by which they may come acceptably to God. In this beaten track they follow one another, and therefore it is no wonder that a loud outcry is raised against the doctrines of grace. And as the unregenerate are strangers to real holiness, they can take no delight in the

the things of God. Hearing sermons, reading the bible, praying to God, and being in the way of religious conference, is wearisome and irksome to them. Sacred exercises of every kind, are to them dull and uncomfortable things; and therefore they conclude, they are the same to others. Hence they conceive of religion, as being burdensome and melancholy; and that the people of God are strangers to real pleasure and happiness. Thus they are prejudiced against religion, and speak reproachfully of it. The reason of which is, they are strangers to the new birth, and to the nature of vital Godliness. Their hearts remain at enmity to God, they have no desires after him, and can take no pleasure in thinking or hearing of him. *They say unto God, depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of thy ways.* Job xxi. 14.

3. A profession of the gospel, or engaging in the forms of religion, will be inavailable to our present or future happiness, if we are not brought near to God. To attend the forms of godliness, to make a particular and public profession of the gospel, and to grace that profession with an external regularity and order, are things which may go far to recommend you to observers; and many may say of you, behold, an Israelite indeed. But, O how wretched and miserable must you be, and how awful your state, if all this beautiful garnish of religion should only prove *a fair shew in the flesh*; if amidst all your devotions and forms, you remain a stranger to the new birth, and the spirit of holiness; be only a worshipper in the outer court, and never *enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus*. Self-examination is exceeding needful here; because herein mankind are in danger, not only of deceiving others, but what is

worst of all, of putting the cheat on their own souls. You cannot think this hint unnecessary, if you duly consider and compare the following scriptures. Mat. vii. 21, 22, 23. xv. 8, 9. xxiii. 25—28. Luke xiii. 26—28. Acts viii. 21. 1 Cor. iv. 20. 2 Tim. iii. 5. Rev. iii. 1.

4. Those, who are by divine grace brought near to God, shall never be separated from him. Are you, brethren, experimentally acquainted with that access to God, of which I have been speaking? then surely, you will readily acknowledge, that it is by divine grace, *you are what you are.* 1 Cor. v. 10. And if the Lord hath displayed his marvellous loving kindness, in doing so much, so great things for you, as to call you into his kingdom and glory, and to adopt you as his children; you may be assured he will not forsake you, *being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.* Phil. i. 6. O ye children of the most high God, go on your way rejoicing. It is given you to believe in Jesus, and by this faith, you have a present enjoyment of everlasting life. The word of truth in your hearts is *that incorruptible seed, which liveth and abideth for ever.* The eternal Spirit of God dwelleth in you, and this is a certain earnest, and pledge, of eternal glory. All the perfections of the ever gracious and omnipotent Jehovah, are employed for your security. Jesus, who hath an everlasting priesthood, appears in heaven for you. He holds you in his hands, and none can, nor shall pluck you thence. Having therefore *access into this grace wherein ye stand*, and being interested in that love, which is everlasting, and that covenant, which is inviolable, you may *rejoice in hope of the glory of God,* Rom. v. 2.

5. Here also, I might take notice of the high dignity, and distinguishing happiness of the saints. Those who, by faith in the gospel, have access to God, stand in the nearest and most happy relation to him. They are interested in blessings superior to what *eye hath seen, or ear heard; or what hath ever entered into the heart of man.* The relation is honorable, and indissoluble; and the blessings are substantial and eternal. What can the world, or the devil, or sin present, that admits of any comparison with this? What are the honors, the riches, the pleasures, which the ungodly enjoy, when contrasted with the sacred and immutable Magna Charta of the gospel? Thine it is, O believer, to say, "This is my God for ever and ever. Jesus is mine, and I am his, "It is my Father's good pleasure to give me a kingdom. I am a child and favourite of God, and "nothing shall separate me from his love." This is the happiness of the meanest and poorest saints. Though they have nothing they can call their own, though they are tossed with tempests of tribulation, and pass through fiery trials, and have no friend on earth, to whom they can apply for relief and assistance; yet *the eternal God is their refuge, and underneath are his everlasting arms. His eyes are over them, and his ears open to their prayers. And he shall guide them by his council, and afterward receive them to glory.* Deut. xxxiii. 27. 1 Pet. iii. 12. Psalm lxxiii. 24.

6. Those who are experimentally acquainted with the grace and the privilege, of which I have been speaking, are called to render the most grateful acknowledgments and praises to the great author of this grace. When you review, brethren, the miseries of your fallen state, and reflect on the great things, which

which your gracious God and Saviour hath done for you; when you survey your present privileges, and happy enjoyments; and look forward to what is reserved in heaven for you, surely gratitude must warm your hearts, and *the high praises of God be on your lips*. Such grace as this, so rich, so free, and so wonderful, demands eternal hallelujahs. Those who know this grace in truth, and live under its sacred influence, will find a suitable disposition to sing praise to the Lord. Their hearts and lips will move in delightful concord towards their exalted Saviour, while they attempt to shew forth all *his praise in the gates of the daughters of Zion, and rejoice in his salvation*. But this divine joy and praise now begun on earth, shall be heightened, improved, and perfected, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels; when he shall complete the salvation of his people, and destroy the very last of their enemies; when he shall conduct them to the fountain head of felicity, and the full fruition of the eternal God. Then *the ransomed of the Lord shall come to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away*, Isa. xxxv. 10.

